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THE SCHOOL OF TOMORROW
– PEDAGOGY STUDENTS’ THOUGHTS

Abstract

In this article I rise the subject of the students’ vision of the school of tomorrow. The research was conducted on a group of 200 first-year pedagogy students, who had written an essay about the school of the future. The analysis of the gathered empirical material was the basis for distinguishing twelve categories of describing the school of the future. The categories were: the infrastructure and localisation of school, school functions, school aims, school financing, school stationery, the organisation of the didactic process, teacher’s traits, personnel, parents’ activity, social benefits and transportation of the pupils to school. These categories were the most important for students and they showed the areas which should be transformed.

Introduction

The futuristic vision of school as an institution where people spend a significant part of their lives evokes hope, controversy and concern. Theoreticians and practitioners engaged in education sciences (Denek, 1998; O nowy…; B. Siemienicki, 2003; Technologia…; É. Claparéde, 2005; Szkoła…; R. Pachociński, 2006; Oświata…; E. Perzycka, 2006; Nauczyciel…; H. Nilsen, 2007; The Student…, H. Schoenebeck, 2009; Jaka…) have been discussing the vision of the future of school for a long time now. The popularity of this subject theme is due to the fact that, according to a survey conducted recently by Centrum Badania Opinii
Spolecznej (CBOS), almost 40 per cent of Poles think that the education in Poland does not fulfill its guidelines properly. The Polish education system, however, is positively seen by only a half of the respondents (Spoleczny..., 2007).

More than half the Poles are in favour of introducing changes in the system of education. Almost 30 per cent indicate the necessity of conducting major modifications in the Polish school. According to 31 per cent of the respondents, the changes in school should be of a cosmetic character rather than a revolutionary one. On the other hand, 80 per cent of pupils and students are in favour of introducing changes in the system of education. The changes should concern each and every aspect of school functioning. Most of the respondents were in favour of changing the education model that corresponds with the currently prevailing ideology (20 per cent of the respondents). The following were indicated most often: the increase of discipline and expectations from the pupils (25 per cent of the respondents), safety level increase (8 per cent), introduction of uniforms (6 per cent), more after-school classes (3 per cent). The national curriculum, handbooks and the way of checking and marking were yet another aspect that should be reformed (17 per cent of all respondents). According to 12 per cent of the respondents, a ‘Polish teacher’ should also change. Most of all, the range of his powers should be broadened and the prestige of this profession should be increased. 12 per cent of Poles also indicated that the Polish education system could use some structural changes that would mainly manifest themselves in the return to the system before the education reform in 1999¹, a small number of the respondents (2 per cent) also indicated the necessity of introducing changes connected with equating the education possibilities for the children and youths from different environments and the increase in financing the education (Spoleczny..., 2007).

The areas that should undergo a change pointed by the Poles correspond with the assumptions of modern education. According to the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century guidelines, it should be based on four pillars. They are called as follows: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be. The first pillar is about individualisation and providing access to modern teaching methods.

¹ Prior to 1999 an eight-grade elementary school was obligatory in Poland. After graduation one could apply for admittance to secondary schools: general or trade. Currently there is a different system in force in Poland and it consists of: a six-grade elementary school, three-grade junior high-school; secondary schools are: a three-grade specialised lyceum, four-grade technical college, two/three-grade trade school and two-grade complementary lyceum and three-grade complementary technical college (the latter two are for the trade school graduates).
aids for pupils. The second one concerns teaching practical skills and cooperation as well as developing communication skills. The next pillar teaches how to live with other people, communicate with them, solve conflicts. It also covers establishing a relationship of intimate and social character that should result in developing a need for supporting others and living in peace. The fourth pillar, however, relates to individual development of a person. All education actions should be on the way to develop full humanity (Białek, 2002).

The social discourse concerning the vision of the future school became a predictor for conducting a study among the University of Szczecin first year pedagogy students about what their vision of The School of Tomorrow was.

On the basis of the conducted study, twelve categories of relevant importance for the respondents concerning the functioning of the school of the future were distinguished. I have defined and distinguished these categories on the basis of a precise analysis of all of the students’ essays. Determining and stipulating the categories by the author is consistent with the assumptions of the constructive grounded theory, which the conducted study was based on. The following aspects were the most often indicated in the essays: the infrastructure and localisation of school, school functions, school aims, school financing, school stationery, the organisation of the didactic process, teacher’s traits, personnel, parents’ activity, social benefits and transportation of the pupils to school.

The infrastructure and localisation of school category includes students’ view on school buildings and their localisation. School aims are related to school’s functions and specify the required conjuncture of the didactic, tutelar and educational level which the school should attempt to achieve. The school financing category includes the methods of raising funds by the school for its own maintenance, indicated by the respondents. The school stationery are defined as teaching aids of any kind, necessary for both the pupils and teachers in gaining and transferring the knowledge. In the organisation of the didactic process the students named their ideas as for how the education and training processes should be conducted in school. The teacher’s traits category describes the required psychological, spiritual and physical traits of the teacher. The same determinants refer to the pupil’s traits category. The next category indicated – personnel – refers to the people working in school, although on other positions than the teacher. Parents’ activity is a category specifying the involvement of the parents in the so-called school life. The following category is social benefits, it specifies the material support of kind that is provided by school to
the pupils. The transportation of the pupils to school, on the other hand, includes possible ways of transporting pupils to school.

The categories selected on the basis of the analysis refer to matters indicated by Polish respondents in a study conducted by CBOS. Both the first and the second group noticed the imperfections of the Polish school and tried to point the directions of its transformation.

The results of the research I have conducted and interpretation thereof are described in the following part of the article.

**Research Methodology**

The conducted research is of a qualitative character and it was based on the assumptions of the constructive grounded theory (Charmaz, 2009), a researcher employing this theory focuses on recognising and presenting the studied part of life. It means focusing on the empirical reality and its collective interpretation. The constructive approach in the grounded theory assumes that the researcher enters a given reality with his own interpretative system that is based on his interests, studies contexts, experiences in a given matter etc. Therefore the researcher also takes part in creating the data by categorising and interpreting it. The choice of this qualitative research theory was caused by the possibilities of interpretation, comparing the categories and critical analysis of them, which are provided by this approach.

The research subject was the vision of the school of the future created by pedagogy students. The aim of the research was of descriptive character and was about describing the school of the future as seen through the eyes of the pedagogy students. The main research problem was narrowed down to the question: what is the pedagogy students’ vision of the school of the future?

The research was conducted between November and December 2009 on a group of 200 first-year pedagogy students (full time BA program). Women (76 per cent) significantly outnumbered men (24 per cent) in this group. The participating students were asked to write an essay concerning The School of Tomorrow. The subject was deliberately not specified because the demanded goal was to distinguish the most absorbing aspects related to school among the research participants.

After the verification of the received essays, 182 works were qualified for further analysis. The remaining part could not be interpreted because its content did not correlate with the subject of the conducted study.

The personal documents method was employed for the analysis. In the framework of this method the content analysis technique was used. The
tools used in the study were the content analysis matrixes (Lobocki, 1978).

**Research Results**

The analysis of the gathered empirical material (182 essays) was the basis for distinguishing twelve categories of describing the school of the future. Those categories were characterised in the introduction to this article. The table below presents the arrangement of the references to the given aspects.

**Tab. 1.** The number of the respondents’ references to the given categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>The frequency of taking up the subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the organisation of the didactic process</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the teacher’s traits</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the infrastructure and localisation of school</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the pupil’s traits</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school stationery</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school functions</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personnel</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social benefits</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parents’ activity</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school financing</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school aims</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transportation of the pupils to school</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author's study.
The students mainly focused on describing the aspects relating to the organisation of the didactic process. This aspect was touched upon in 134 essays. The respondents also focused a lot of attention on teacher's traits, what is shown in 125 essays touching upon this aspect, and to the pupil of the future – in 84 essays. The aspect of the infrastructure and localisation of school was touched upon 91 times. The four aforementioned categories were the most often raised topics thus they constituted the most important areas of the school functioning for the respondents. Due to this fact I shall analyse them more specifically in the further parts of the article.

The organisation of the didactic process was an aspect broadly described by the students. The respondents indicated many ideas for changes that could be introduced in this area. It is worth mentioning that all the students related the pupil’s main activity to participating in lessons. Nobody suggested any other alternative for this way of organising the school education. It is also interesting that none of the respondents indicated a different to the currently valid option for lessons’ duration.

One of the more often (38) indicated changes that are to take place in the school of the future will be reducing the number of pupils in classes. The classes will consist of maximally fifteen pupils. According to the respondents, this will contribute to the work comfort and its individualisation. The classes should be organised in smaller groups which will make the work easier for both the teacher and pupils. This way no pupil will be anonymous.

The respondents also claimed that in the school of the future the classes will be scheduled from the morning till the early afternoon. The lessons will take place from 8 A.M. till 3 P.M., there will be no afternoon classes because then the children will have more time for studying, their hobbies and spending the time with their parents. The one-shift system is better mainly because the children will get used to it and thus will go to school more eagerly.

According to my respondents, a diverse system of extra-curricular activities will be significantly emphasised in the school of the future. The pupils will be able to participate in various clubs and classes held in a highly-developed sports infrastructure in the school as well as compensatory classes. The purpose of this is to show the pupils that in school one does not have to learn only but can also have fun and develop his interests.

The fact that the respondents raised the topic of school trips is also interesting. According to the respondents, there should be plenty of such trips during the school year. They should concern becoming acquainted with the world and the environment. The pupils are to visit interesting parts of Poland and the world, which should expand their knowledge of culture,
religion, tradition and history. The trips are also related to another demand that should be realised in the school of the future. Namely, we should leave the theoretical teaching in favour of practical one because the learning is not only about passing the exams but mainly about preparing an individual for life and independence.

An interesting, often raised (53) topic was homework. Some of the respondents (4) think that in the school of the future one should leave the idea of homework. It is suggested that they be done during the lessons. The significant number of the students (49) is in favour of reducing the amount of homework in a rational way. *The everyday homework could be replaced with one, bigger, week homework.*

Keeping up with the technology development pace, in the school of the future a part of the lessons should be conducted via Internet. E-learning perfectly complements (...) the traditional ways of teaching. Flexible work time, pupils’ comfort (especially if they have other commitments too), making the communication between the pupils easier, better adjustment for the pupils, more diverse teaching due to multimedia and non-verbal presentation of the material are named the advantages of the e-learning. It enables to teach in one’s own pace and minimise fear and shyness which could happen in a traditional class. The usage of video techniques enables learning via audiovisual material which can be paused and wound for repeated seeing.

Another important aspect in the school of the future is the **profile of the teacher of the future.** It should be stressed that the respondents described in detail the traits that such teacher should have. Mainly, he will be both a teacher and a tutor. The teacher of tomorrow will be a qualified and comprehensive person. *It is a fact that the teacher should and even has to train himself throughout his whole life.* Before starting to work with children and youths he should take psychological tests. According to the respondents’ opinion, this teacher will be young because such people are characterised by (...) charisma, ingenuity, they are not boring and they are able to understand the pupil. He will be an authority for the pupils as well as a confidant of their secrets.

The teacher is also supposed to be a guide that will show how to function in the social reality. His another important trait is the composure and addressing the pupil with respect. This teacher will not criticise but will talk with the child about his problems and difficulties. He has to be a child-liking person that easily establishes contact with them. *The teacher should encourage the children to learn by introducing a nice and friendly atmosphere in the class. a person who teaches children should adore them, be nice, cheerful and always smiled. Such person should encourage the pupils*
to various tasks by an interesting method of teaching. He should arouse both respect and trust, be a friend of children. It is also important that he will treat all pupils justly. He will be patient and helpful for them. He has got to be close to the pupils for his commands and information not to miss them and be accepted by them. I would not like the teacher to be just a person that transmits the knowledge. He has to be an exemplar of behaviour and attitude. He cannot favour or harm anyone; he should spend an equal amount of time with everyone. He has to engage the pupils into discussion, conduct the lessons in a clear and comprehensive way and be able to evaluate the pupil’s abilities justly. It is important to employ the rule of graduating the difficulty, the teacher should lead the program from the general idea to a detailed one.

One of the most widely described categories was the infrastructure and localisation of school. Due to the matter in subject’s architectural aspect, the research material raising this topic was divided into three groups. a part of the respondents (42) thought that the school building should be big and spacious. Others (29) said that the school should be small and cozy. The remaining ones (20) did not include the architectural vision of the school but only the localisation thereof in their essays.

The school of the future is colourful, bright and has many windows. It is situated away from the city centre, desirably in a quiet and surrounded with greenery area. An example of the aforementioned description can be the statement of one of the students: [School] should be located (...) in the suburbs, in a quiet and peaceful place, among forests, lakes. This place should be associated with something magical, irreplaceable. Another student stated that: Each school of the future should be modern and practical. It should be located away from the noise and bustle of the city. Bright and spacious classes will make the atmosphere nice.

Gyms, the school playground and pool should be located in the school area. All these facilities are supposed to increase the pupils’ fitness in the framework of the physical education and providing them with alternative and interesting forms of spending leisure time actively.

Another attribute of the school of tomorrow is its modernity, both in the technical and electronical sense, and its adjustment to the pupils’ needs. The building should be adjusted to the needs of the disabled and be equipped with an efficient fire protection system. An important piece of equipment in the school is the monitoring system which – in the opinion of the students – should consist of many video cameras installed in the school building and in the area adjacent to it, as well as fingerprints scanners, badges and a security guard.
One of the respondents justified the necessity of installing the aforementioned safety measures in the following way: the pupils safety-providing equipment are mainly video cameras installed outside the school, which enable the teaching staff to control what people enter the school area and so, if needed, call law enforcement that will take care of the pupils’ safety. The video cameras inside the school are also important, for example in a situation where the order has to be maintained but a teacher is not able to carry out his duty on a corridor (...). I also think that beside the professional equipment, a security guard should be employed in the school, he would supervise the control taken over the people that enter the school area from outside the school. For making the work of the ‘watchman’ easier, the pupils should have school badges with personal data, a photo and the class they are attending and teachers should also have such badges – this would make the work of the person taking care of the school safety easier. The perceiving of the school of the future as a keep secured and inaccessible for the people from the outside is characteristic for over 60 per cent of the respondents who tried to describe the infrastructure and localisation of school in their essays.

In the school of the future the pupils will have an unlimited access to professionally-equipped laboratories, a rich-collection library where they will find not only books but also electronic data, cozy reading-rooms, a consulting room, psychological and pedagogical office and a common room. The respondents paid special attention to the need of introduction of a doctor and psychologist into the school everyday life. They would be on pupils’ disposal not only at scheduled terms but when a need would occur.

A canteen and a tuck shop should function in the school. One should notice that the canteen is indicated by the respondents significantly more often (24 times; whereas tuck shop was indicated 9 times). (...) in the school of the future one should pay more attention to pupils’ feeding. The canteens should be enriched with more varied and nutritious menus. The children suffering from allergies and alimentary canal problems should be able to eat a hot meal too. Additionally, the school board should have more influence on what is being sold in the tuck shops, getting rid of the unhealthy food. Thanks to this, the children would be healthier and have no obesity problems.

A big group of respondents (27) raised the topic of school lockers in their essays. They would function as a personal belongings repository. But mainly they would serve as places where one can leave his handbooks or footwear.

Classrooms are yet another important aspect of the school of the future. They should be spacious, well-illuminated and supplied with the needed
equipment. The essays present a vision of a classroom which is a comfortable and a cosy room where one can socially develop oneself and gain knowledge as successfully as in the formal space. In the future, the pupils will be following the curriculum in comfortable desks or even in armchairs designed to their needs. Each of them will have a laptop or an interactive panel on disposal. The central place in the classroom will be the board. However, it will not be a traditional blackboard. It will be replaced with a smart board.

The computerisation of the school is one of the most often recurring aspects in the students’ essays. They see the necessity of informatisation of the modern school and making it meet the standards of the western Europe schools, where computers and the Internet are widely accessible for pupils. It is connected with the on-going informatisation of everyday life and the possibility of a social exclusion of the people that do not have the stable access to information.

The students, however, do not have the detailed requirements for the teacher only, the pupil of the school of the future should be characterised by many important traits too. The pupil of the school of the future should respect his teacher; should not eavesdrop; should be honourable when answering for his acts and modest if misbehaved; should treat his peers with respect and help them if needed; should obey the rules that are in force in a given school and should expand his knowledge that he had already acquired on lessons of his own free will – and not to make his “master’s” work more difficult, help him and cooperate with him and his peers as well as have no bad influence on them. In the school of the future the pupil is an active subject that independently decides what will he learn. He is also responsible for his process of education. Such independence is provided for him by an appropriate organisation of the didactic process. He is also an individual that respects and trusts his teacher. He is the teacher’s partner and not his subordinate.

In the considerations about the subject of the pupil the topic of uniforms occurs very often. Although it is not a pupil’s trait, it affects the sense of belonging to a given school. Some of the respondents (44) thinks that in the school of the future the uniforms should be obligatory. Some (32) think that wearing the same uniforms is supposed to level the status differences between the pupils. Others (12) think that the uniforms should be obligatory, but their look should be subject to free interpretation. Each pupil could incorporate some individual changes in the worn uniform.
Summary

The future school is located in a picturesque place, there is a rich sport and recreation facility. Its location and architecture is open for the pupil’s needs. The implemented curriculum is individualised and targeted at the development of a given individual. In the school of the future there works a highly-specialised teaching staff that shows an emotional bond with its pupils. The administration, teachers and pupils address themselves with respect.

The organisation of the didactic process in the school of tomorrow is still to be based on the class-lesson system which, according to the respondents, requires only slight corrections. Many students focused on reducing the number of the pupils in classes and therefore providing higher individualisation of teaching. The need of being noticed by the significant others, the teachers in this case, was confirmed in numerous studies. Being noticed is a term synonymous to being important (Nilsen, 2007). Because of this, the pupils care very much about not being anonymous in the class. In the school of the future this problem will be eliminated because smaller classes will enable the teacher to have personal contact with each pupil.

The individual approach to pupils is also a very often mentioned change that will happen in the future school. The teachers will adjust to the pupils’ needs and not the other way around. Such perception of school correlates with the concept of Inge Eidsvåg who thinks that the children should not adapt to the school’s requirements but rather the school should adjust to various needs of the pupils. He thinks that the current school focuses too much on verbal skills and the development of pupils’ logical thinking. However, the knowledge, requirements and expectations have to be perceived in a holistic way (Nilsen, 2007). The future school should focus on these change directions.

The cooperation between the teachers and pupils is also important. The process of education and nurturing is based on the rule of cooperation, dialogue and discussion. One can recall here the concept of acting-experiencing, where both the tutor and the ward react to the behaviour of the other human. The education and nurturing are two-level relationships where both interaction subjects are equivalent (Śliwierski, 2007). The teacher will become the pupil’s partner. The relationship between them will be based on mutual respect and recognition, it will be a cooperation of two equivalent subjects. The teacher will fully devote himself to his pupil. Such perception of the teacher refers to concept of Eidsvåg who thinks that the teacher should even love his pupils. a good teacher does not forget his
pupils. When she sends them home after the school day, they will continue to be her belief, hope, and love. (Nilsen, 2007, p. 285).

The vision of the teacher as a good and pupil-loving person contradicts with the necessity of controlling the pupils by the teachers, presented by the students. The monitoring and control in the school introduce a division between those who have power (the teachers) and those who are submitted (the pupils). Such relation causes distortion on the subject—subject level in the teacher-pupil relationship. However, it indicates the pupils’ need for the teachers to be higher in the school hierarchy and be in power. It shows the pupils’ unwillingness to have full responsibility for their acts.

When submitted to the teachers, they renounce their responsibility to them. In the presented vision, however, the pupils are ‘more equal.’ They have more rights and less responsibilities than the teachers. An idyllic vision of the school is disturbed by equipping it with a modern safety system. Video cameras, fingerprints scanners, badges and uniforms are rather associated with a penal institution in which the residents are not trusted. The managing body (teachers) have full control over what is happening in the area in order to prevent the unexpected danger. This situation is interpreted in a twofold ways. The first one is narrowed down to taking over the public opinion by some of the respondents in the field of installing video cameras in schools, employing security workers to increase the safety of the attending children and to save them from drug dealers, paedophiles and other potential dangers. The second way of interpretation narrows down to stating that students perceive the school as an oppressive institution set on control. This control should even strengthen in the future, paradoxically not to make the pupils feel safe there, but to make them feel like pupils in school area only. School in this interpretation is an otherworldly place, where everything is controlled and therefore there is no place for the pupil’s freedom. The unwillingness of the respondents towards school and rules that are in force there is shown in this perspective.

Recapitulating this aspect of the research, one can derive that a remedy for the current problems in school is to submit the social life to monitoring. However, one should remember about a significantly important phenomenon that was more widely described by Michel Foucault, a man that knows he is being observed acts accordingly to the role he is given. He acts significantly different when he is aware of the fact that he is not being observed (Foucault, 1998).

It is important that the respondents see and interpret the practices in the present school that lead to subduing their freedom. However, by trying to level them, they are creating new areas of risk. Therefore, the school still
should provide the knowledge, but not necessarily teaching a critical approach to it and to one’s life too.

References


Internet Resources